



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Afghanistan

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The country experienced civil war, political violence, religious and political extremism, and misrule for more than 25 years before 2001. In December 2001, the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) took office, and in June 2002, the Emergency Loya Jirga, a gathering of Afghan representatives from throughout the country, elected Hamid Karzai as President of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA). Karzai subsequently formed a Cabinet that featured broad ethnic representation and included women. On January 4, 2004, representatives at the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) adopted a new Constitution that provides for equal rights for women and minorities and reaffirms commitment to international human rights conventions. On October 9, 2004, Afghan voters elected Hamid Karzai as President. All legal religious guidelines adopted under TISA are still applicable. The new Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The new Constitution proclaims that the "religion of the state is the sacred religion of Islam." It also states that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law." In general, there were fewer reports of problems involving religious freedom than in previous years.

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country have been difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Some conservative elements advocated that a new constitution should favor the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence associated with the Sunnis over the Jafari school used by the Shi'as. In family disputes, courts relied on a civil code that is based on the Sunni Hanafi school, regardless of whether the parties involved were Shi'a or Sunni; the civil code also applies to non-Muslims. Conservative elements also called for the primacy of Shari'a in the legal system. However, the Constitution does not grant preferential status to the Hanafi school, nor does it make specific reference to Shari'a law. The Constitution also grants that Shi'a law will be applied in cases dealing with personal matters involving Shi'as; there is no separate law applying to non-Muslims.

Prior to the fall of the Taliban, the U.S. Government did not maintain an official presence in the country. The Secretary of State designated the Taliban as a particularly severe violator of religious freedom with Country of Particular Concern status in 1999, 2000, and 2001. Since December 2001, when the U.S. Embassy in Kabul re-opened, the U.S. government has discussed religious freedom issues with local officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 251,738 square miles, and its population is approximately 25.8 million. Reliable data on religious demography is not available because an official, nationwide census has not been taken in decades. Observers estimate that 84 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim; approximately 15 percent is Shi'a Muslim; and other religions, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews, make up less than 1 percent of the population. There also is a small, low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of adherents of other religions.

Traditionally, Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence has been the dominant religion. For the last 200 years, Sunnis often have looked to the example of the Darul Uloom madrassah (religious school) located in Deoband near Delhi, India. The Deobandi school has long sought to purify Islam by discarding supposedly un-Islamic accretions to the faith and reemphasizing the models that it believes were established in the Qur'an and the customary practices of the Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, Deobandi scholars often have opposed what they perceive as Western influences. Much of the population adheres to Deobandi-influenced Hanafi Sunnism, but a sizable minority adheres to a more mystical version of Islam, generally known as Sufism. Sufism centers on orders or brotherhoods that follow charismatic religious leaders.

Several regions are religiously homogeneous. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns, centered around the city of Kandahar, dominate the south and east of the country. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras is in the Hazarajat, or the mountainous central highlands around Bamiyan. Northeastern provinces traditionally have Ismaili populations. Other areas, including Kabul, the capital, are more heterogeneous. For example, in and around the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif, there is a mix of Sunnis (including ethnic Pashtuns, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Tajiks) and Shi'a (Hazaras and Qizilbash), including Shi'a Ismailis.

In the past, small communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Christians lived in the country; however, most members of these communities have left. Even at their peak, these non-Muslim minorities constituted less than 1 percent of the population. Most of the small Hindu and Sikh populations, which once numbered approximately 50,000 persons, emigrated or took refuge abroad during the many years of conflict. However, after the fall of the Taliban, some minorities have begun to return. Non-Muslims such as Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews were estimated to number only in the hundreds at the end of Taliban rule. In 2003, the most recent year for which estimates are available, approximately 3,000 Sikh and Hindu families were living in Afghanistan.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Until the adoption of the January 2004 Constitution, the 1964 Constitution was Afghan law. The judicial system, which is in need of significant reform, will present an ongoing challenge to full and effective enforcement of the 2004 Constitution.

The new Constitution proclaims that Islam is the "religion of the state"; however, it does not prohibit the practice of other religions. The new Constitution also declares "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." It also states that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law."

The licensing and registration of religious groups is not required. Proselytism was practiced but discreetly; there are no laws forbidding the practice even though it is viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported incidents involving difficulties of individuals attempting to proselytize. Article 1 of the current, unreformed Penal Code (held over from previous regimes) states that the Code addresses only Tazir (less serious) crimes, and that the more serious categories of Qisas and Hudud crimes fall under Shari'a. Blasphemy and apostasy (converting from Islam to another religion) fall under the latter category, and are--in theory--punishable by death. The Constitution states that any existing laws will remain in place unless either deemed unconstitutional or revised. For the most part, the penal code has not been subjected to review. There were no reported incidents of conversion during the reporting period.

The new Constitution makes no reference to Shari'a, and Article 7 commits the state to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international treaties and conventions to which the country is a party. Although the rights of conversion and proselytism are not spelled out explicitly in the Constitution, both the UDHR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the country also has ratified, require protection of these rights. Article 34 of the new Constitution protects freedom of expression and of the press. The Afghan Press Law, adopted in 2002, contains an injunction against information that "could mean insult to the sacred religion of Islam and other religions." The ambiguity surrounding what constitutes offensive material offers the potential for abuse of this clause to restrict press freedom and intimidate journalists. The Afghan Press Law did not require information to comply with Shari'a. However, the section on criminal rules states that if no punishment is prescribed in existing legal codes for crimes mentioned in the press law, then the punishment will be in accordance with Shari'a (Hanafi school). These rules also apply to non-Muslims. The law was reviewed by the Ministry of Information and Culture, and President Karzai signed the amended Afghan Law on Mass Media into law in late March 2004. The Law on Mass Media retains the broad and vague content restriction on "subjects that are contrary to principles of Islam and offensive to other religions and sects," but it excludes any reference to Shari'a.

Only Islamic holy days are celebrated as public holidays. The Government has proclaimed the first day of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Muhammad's birthday, and the 10th of Muharram (Ashura--both Sunni and Shi'a) as national holidays. All mark events on the Islamic calendar, and there were no reports that these holidays negatively affected other religious groups. The Shi'a community is able to celebrate openly the birthday of Imam Ali, one of the most revered figures in the Shi'a tradition, as well as commemorate the 10th of Muharram (Ashura), which marks the murder Muhammad's grandson Hussein. There were no reported incidents surrounding Shi'a religious celebrations during the reporting period.

The parts of the educational system that survived more than 20 years of war place considerable emphasis on religion. During the reporting period, the public school curriculum included content on Islam but not on other religions. Non-Muslims were not required to study Islam. Detailed religious study was conducted under the guidance of religious leaders. There was no restriction on parental religious teaching. The Ministry of Education began introducing human rights as a subject in the national school curriculum at the beginning of the school year in March 2003 and extended it nationwide in March 2004. A general curriculum and textbooks that emphasize Islamic terms and principles steadily replaced the preaching of jihad in schools. By the end of the period covered by this report, all schools in Kabul and the surrounding provinces were using the new texts, totaling approximately 15, or just under half, of all provinces.

The Human Rights Commission conducted national consultations on transitional justice, promoted reconciliation at civil society gatherings, and, through various media, continued to receive reports of abuses from citizens. In 2003, the Ministry of Interior established a Human Rights Department to investigate abuses, and this department set up local branches in the offices of chiefs of police. As of May 2005, all provinces have human rights departments to investigate abuses.

There are five or six gurdwaras, or Sikh places of worship, in Kabul, and worshippers generally are free to visit, as threats have ceased. President Karzai visited the Sikh school in the summer of 2002 (co-located with the only functioning gurdwara), after which the Ministry of Education assigned four part-time Dari-language teachers to the school. Shi'a schools are permitted unrestricted operation. There are no Christian or Jewish schools, no Christian churches, and one synagogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy and is punishable by death under Shari'a. However, the new Constitution makes no reference to Shari'a, and Article 7 commits the state to abide by the international treaties and conventions that require protection of this right. During the reporting period, there were unconfirmed reports that converts to Christianity faced societal discrimination and threats and in some cases were killed. The press reported the killings of five male converts to Christianity near the eastern border between June and August 2004, but these reports could not be confirmed. There was no information available concerning restrictions on the general training of clergy. Immigrants and noncitizens were free to practice their own religions. In Kabul, 200 to 300 expatriates meet regularly at Christian worship services, which are held in private locations because there are no Christian churches in the country. Since the fall of the Taliban, no political parties (other than the Taliban) have been banned or discouraged. However, after TISA passed the Political Parties Registration Law in 2003, the Supreme Court banned communists from forming a political party on the grounds that communists are atheists. Christian-affiliated international relief organizations generally operated throughout the country without interference, and there were no reports of incidents of harassment during the period covered by this report. After an attack in late September 2003 that killed two employees of the Voluntary Association for Rehabilitation of Afghanistan, a Taliban spokesman accused the organization and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of preaching Christianity; there were no further details on the attack during the reporting period. There are no known foreign missionaries in the country.

In 2001, the former Department of Vice and Virtue was dissolved and replaced by the Department of Accountability and Religious Affairs. According to the Minister of Hajj and Mosques, no former members of the Department of Vice and Virtue were employed by the Ministry.

Shi'as are permitted to go on the Hajj, and there is no quota system for those making the pilgrimage. Participants are selected by lottery.

Most women in rural areas wear burqas, a traditional full body and face covering; however, many urban women did not wear burqas before the Taliban imposed this practice. Although a number of women in urban areas no longer wear the burqa since the fall of the Taliban, a majority of women continue to do so either from choice or community pressure.

There were a few reports that government forces at local levels prohibited music, movies, and television on religious grounds. In June and July 2004, Kabul and Jalalabad provincial governments banned cable TV, but the ban was lifted. In April 2004, officials in Nangarhar Province briefly banned the appearance of women singers on television; however, the officials' superiors reversed their prohibition. On January 14, 2004, Kabul Television broadcast a female singer for the first time in more than a decade, prompting protests from conservatives on the Supreme Court, who briefly forced the station to stop airing such performances. Moderates in the Government lifted that ban in late January 2004, saying women singers on television were permitted under the new Constitution. Previously, in January 2003, the Supreme Court had banned cable television nationwide on religious grounds, but the ban was lifted in April 2003 when the Government passed a law allowing the resumption of cable services. The central Government has not banned any form of media, and the cable television audience in urban centers continued to expand. Unlike in previous years, televisions, radios, and other electronic goods were sold freely, and music was played widely. For example, Kabul continued to have five radio stations, including the official Radio Kabul. Nongovernmental stations broadcast a mix of Afghan, Indian, Pakistani, and Western music. The stations had no religious content other than brief prayers and Qur'an readings on the government-controlled radio station.

In May, two students were suspended for a year from Herat University for commenting on Islam during a religious debate in ways that classmates and a teacher found blasphemous. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported that shortly after the reporting period, the two students were reinstated at the university with all charges suspended. Following the arrests, the students were released from jail and housed, for security purposes, at various safe houses throughout the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Constitution requires that the President and vice-President be Muslim and does not distinguish in this respect between Sunnis and Shi'as. The Muslim requirement is not explicitly stated for government ministers, but the oath required of ministers suggests adherence to the Muslim faith. The Constitution has no religious requirement for Members of Parliament.

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials occurred. In June 2003, two editors of a weekly Kabul publication were arrested for allegedly violating Article 30 of the Afghan Press Law that prohibits publications of articles defaming Islam. Conservatives within the judiciary recommended the journalists be charged with "insulting Islam" or blasphemy; however, senior Government officials ultimately supported action short of criminal prosecution. Police searched the editors' offices, and the national intelligence agency confiscated the editors' publication, "Aftaab," from stores. Moderates led by the Minister of Information and Culture argued for the release of the journalists and a resolution to the Afghan Press Law--since amended--that permits administrative punishment (a fine) in lieu of prosecution. Within a week, President Karzai ordered the editors released on bail; however, the charges of blasphemy were not dropped. Subsequently, the two journalists obtained asylum outside the country during the second half of 2003.

In January 2003, the Governor of Helmand confiscated approximately 200 Hazara-owned shops in Lashkar-e Gah and distributed them to other town residents. The Governor also blocked the Hazara/Shi'a community from building a mosque in

Lashkar-e Gah. While the Human Rights Commission and the UN had reached an agreement in February 2003 with the Governor to compensate Hazara shopkeepers with land elsewhere in Lashkar-e Gah, the Governor had only partly honored this agreement by the end of period covered by this report. The Human Rights Commission stated that the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs failed to complete the agreement, and this case was still open at the end of the reporting period.

In early October 2003, a grenade was lobbed at the only functioning Sikh gurdwara (or temple) in Kabul. There were no casualties. Prior to the incident, local police had warned the gurdwara authorities of a possible attack. Although police and intelligence officials investigated, no suspects had been apprehended by the end of the reporting period.

In an October 2002 incident in Kabul, 28 Tablighi Jamaatis, itinerant lay Sunni missionary preachers, were detained by police for a week. In November 2003, 12 Tablighi preachers were detained for a day in Kandahar. There was no police action against Tablighi preachers during the period covered by the report. The Tablighi claimed their mission was to spread the word of Islam. Some government intelligence officials accused the Tablighi of subversive work for Pakistan. During the period covered by the report, no action was taken against the police who detained the Tablighi preachers. Although an investigation of the group's activities concluded that the group was innocent of spying for Taliban and al-Qa'ida, no action had been taken against the police officers involved in the case by the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

In May 2005, news reports indicated that an Indian Hindu converted to Islam. The conversion ceremony was performed before Supreme Court representatives, the Chief Justice and Chief of the Supreme Court, and local and international media. The conversion does not appear to have been forced.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report. There were reports of attacks on non-Muslim international organizations; however, there are no written records to validate the claims.

Attacks by remnants of the al-Qa'ida and Taliban networks continued during the reporting period. Several killings of religious leaders and attacks on mosques were attributed to al-Qa'ida and Taliban members who objected to their victims' links with the Karzai administration and to their public interpretations of Islam.

Unconfirmed press reports claimed that in September 2004, nine boys and a teacher died when a bomb detonated in the schoolyard of a madrassah in Zurmat. The madrassah offered morning Islamic lessons for local boys and, with support from a foreign-funded agency, had added an afternoon curriculum of English, math, and other subjects taught in regular public schools. In addition, the teachers had been involved in helping men and women register to vote. Taliban terrorists claimed responsibility.

On June 1, a mosque in the southern city of Kandahar was bombed during the funeral of an anti-Taliban cleric who had been shot dead 3 days earlier. Twenty persons, including the chief of the capital's police force, were killed. Taliban insurgents were believed to be behind the attacks.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to stress reconciliation and cooperation among all citizens. Although it primarily is concerned with ethnic reconciliation, it also has expressed concern about religious intolerance. The Government responded positively to international approaches on human rights, including religious freedom. The Government indirectly emphasized ethnic and intrafaith reconciliation through the creation and empowerment of the Judicial, Constitutional, and Human Rights Commissions, composed of members of different ethnic and Muslim religious (Sunni and Shi'a) groups. The Constitutional Commission also included a Hindu member to represent non-Muslim religious minorities. Sikh and Hindu leaders were consulted regularly during the preparation of the draft constitution and elected three delegates, including a woman, to the CLJ.

During the reporting period, the Government included Hazara and other Shi'a figures, such as the Minister of Martyrs and the Disabled Sidiqa Balkhi, Minister of Public Works Suhrab Ali Safari, Minister of Transportation Hinayatullah Qasimi, Minister of Justice Mohammad Sarwar Danish, Second Vice President Karim Khalili, and Minister of Higher Education Sayed Amirshah Hasanyar.

During the period covered by this report, the Human Rights Commission continued to conduct national consultations on transitional justice, promoted reconciliation at civil society gatherings and through various media, and continued to receive reports of abuses from citizens. In April 2003, the Ministry of Interior established a Human Rights Department to investigate

human rights abuses, and this department set up local branches in the offices of Chiefs of Police in all but three provinces. By the end of this reporting period, all provinces had a Human Rights Department to investigate human rights abuses.

The Human Rights Commission also advocated for the rights of Sikhs and Hindus, when this community complained in late 2003 that it was being denied access to its traditional cremation ground in Kabul by local residents. The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs was also sympathetic and responded to this complaint. In March 2004, Kabul municipal authorities allocated an alternative cremation site to the Sikh-Hindu community. This new site was in use at the end of the period covered by this report.

During the reporting period, the Government provided guards for the five or six unused Sikh gurdwaras in Kabul, as well as a shuttle for worshippers. In the summer of 2002, President Karzai visited the Sikh school (co-located with the only functioning gurdwara), after which the Ministry of Education assigned four part-time Dari language teachers to the school.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country have been difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the Sunni population. However, in view of an increase in Shi'a representation in government, there is less hostility from Sunnis. Most Shi'a are members of the Hazara ethnic group, which traditionally has been segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, ethnic, and religious reasons. Throughout the country's history, there have been many examples of conflicts between the Hazaras and other citizens. These conflicts often have had economic and political roots but also have acquired religious dimensions. The treatment of Shi'a varied by locality; however, the active persecution of the Shi'a minority, including Ismailis, under the Taliban regime has ended, and, although some discrimination continues at the local level, Shi'a generally are free to participate fully in public life. The rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups adversely affected adherents of other branches of Islam and other religions.

Non-Muslim minorities such as Sikhs and Hindus continue to face social discrimination and harassment; however, this circumstance is not systematic, and the Government is trying to address their concerns. During the reporting period, some Sikh and Hindu children were not attending schools due to harassment from teachers and students. The Government has not taken any measures to protect these children and reintegrate them into the classroom environment. There were no reports, either confirmed or unconfirmed, of discrimination toward Christians in schools.

After the fall of the Taliban, there continued to be episodic reports of persons at the local level using coercion to enforce social and religious conformity. During the reporting period, President Karzai and other moderates in the central Government opposed attempts by conservative elements to enforce rules regarding social and religious practices based on their interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban's religious police force, the Department of Vice and Virtue, was replaced by the Department of Accountability and Religious Affairs, with a stated goal of promoting "Islamic values"; however, the department lacks any enforcement or regulatory authority.

The practice of forced chastity examinations has reportedly decreased. In 2004, the AIHRC intervened and aggressively launched programs designed to educate all levels of society in the provinces where forced chastity was practiced. The AIHRC conducted surveys in late 2004 that indicated that the practice has declined significantly. However, in Herat, there were continued reports of forced chastity examinations by religious police of women found with males who were not their relatives; however, reports declined during the latter months of the reporting period. It was difficult to know whether this practice was systematic or sporadic, sometimes at the request of family members and in the context of an extremely conservative environment. There were no reports of examinations directed at non-Muslims. Local officials also confronted women over their attire and behavior, although there were no known official policies mandating the wearing of the burqa or regulating the activities of women.

In May 2003, Habibullah, a Muslim cleric with close ties to President Karzai, was shot and killed outside a mosque in Deh Rawood district. Six persons were detained in connection with the killing. President Karzai issued a statement condemning the murder. By the end of the reporting period, there were no arrests and no further information on this case, including on the persons originally detained.

In May 2003, a well-known religious scholar, Mowlawi Haji Abdollah, was shot and killed after leaving a mosque after prayers in central Uruzgan Province. The Government said that remnants of the Taliban and al-Qa'ida were responsible for the crime. The assailants had not been identified by the end of period covered by this report.

In June 2003, a mosque in Kandahar was bombed during the final prayer of the day, and 16 worshippers were wounded. The leader of the mosque and head of Kandahar's Ulema-u-Shura (clerics' council), Mullah Abdullah Fayaz, had stated that the Taliban were not following Islam and that their interpretation of Islam was wrong. The Ministry of the Interior stated that two persons were arrested, one in July 2003 and the other in August 2003. As of May 2005, the MOI stated that the former was in custody pending investigations and the latter was still escaped.

In April 2004, Maulana Abdul Bari, a former Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs in Kandahar, was shot and killed outside his home by suspected Taliban members. At the end of the reporting period, there had been no arrests in the case, which continued to be under investigation.

During the second half of 2004, two mullahs were killed in Ghazni and Muqar provinces. In March 2005, a person in Helmand Province was beheaded for his religious beliefs. No one was charged with the killings.

NGOs reported and the AIHRC confirmed that on September 7, 2004, a large mob attacked several offices and vehicles of NGOs, including the Agha Khan Development Network, in Faizabad in Badakhshan Province. The attack appeared to have responded to rumors that the Agha Khan Development Network was using its aid projects to convert Sunni Muslims and that two women workers were raped at the NGOs' offices. The AIHRC also cited unconfirmed reports of rocket attacks on NGOs in Faizabad during that and other incidents.

On May 9, 2005, Newsweek magazine reported that U.S. interrogators desecrated the Qur'an at Guantanamo Bay. The report sparked demonstrations throughout the country, which resulted in the deaths of 17 persons. Another 120 persons were wounded. A local newspaper reported that an Islamic group reportedly linked to the ousted Taliban regime declared jihad, or holy war, against U.S.-led troops and the Government over the alleged Qur'an desecration.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Government has worked with the Government to promote human rights and religious and ethnic tolerance from the inclusion of minority groups in the Government and military to assistance in the reconstruction of the country and its legal and political processes. During 2003, the United States provided \$600,000 (25,800,000 Afghani) for technical assistance and capacity building for the Human Rights Commission. The United States provided an additional \$5 million (215 million Afghani) to the commission during the reporting period. Embassy representatives meet daily with government officials and routinely with religious and minority figures in an ongoing dialogue regarding the political, legal, religious, and human rights context of the country's reconstruction.

The AIHRC continued providing technical assistance and capacity building from the U.S. Government. It received \$5 million (215 million Afghani) in 2003.

U.S. Government officials supported efforts during the CLJ to include specific language in the draft constitution to provide for equal rights for men and women and to incorporate moderate language on Islam.

The U.S. Government has also worked with civil society organizations to promote religious tolerance. The Civil Development Foundation, a group of reformist, largely Shi'a, citizens, continued to publish the monthly magazine, Democracy, a project funded by a U.S. grant of \$68,843 (3 million Afghani) to cover expenses from July 2004 to April 2005. One of the goals of Democracy is to challenge "religious despotism" and to promote a liberal and tolerant interpretation of Islam. Other U.S. grants also helped to establish independent community and commercial radio stations throughout the country that broadcast programs on a range of topics including democracy and human rights issues. During this reporting period, the U.S. continued providing support to radio stations throughout the country.

Between March and July 2004, the U.S. Government funded a visit to the United States of 25 mullahs under a program on "Democracy and Civil Society." The approximate cost of this program was \$250,000 (10,750,000 Afghani).

Released on November 8, 2005

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51615.htm)